

AGENDA ITEM: Library of California Reference Program**GENERAL OVERALL PROGRAM UPDATE:****BACKGROUND:**

The CLSA State Reference Centers program has never been funded by the state. That program and services are described in Education Code Sections 18760-18764, and the similar (though not identical) LoC services are described in Education Code Section 18853(a).

The LoC program element calls for “access to specialized information expertise and resources statewide to answer information requests generated by its primary clientele that are beyond the capacity or capability of a member institution or public library jurisdiction and its regional library network.” It also indicates that “Provision shall be made for information formats specially relevant to culturally diverse populations and persons with disabilities.”

As planning for the LoC Reference program begins, the concepts of the unfunded CLSA Reference Centers program are being considered under that broader planning effort in an attempt to frame a cohesive, complete statewide reference services program that would serve Californians through libraries of all types and not continue design of programs fragmented by type of library.

CURRENT STATUS: In accordance with Board direction, the 2001/2002 budget request for Library of California funding did not include any element specifically for the statewide reference components of the Act, pending staff and Board work on further defining those components.

Work does continue, using LSTA funds, to test and refine potential LoC reference services components, as described below.

FIRST SOURCE:

An LSTA grant for 2001/2002 has been submitted to continue testing and refinement of this statewide reference services component through the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL). This grant provides access to a substantial number of electronic resources, delivery of print materials, and prompt technical support. This year's program will provide First Source service only to the CLSA reference centers. It will not continue direct service to the six rural libraries. LAPL has completed an informal evaluation of the effectiveness of the First Source service and that data will be used in developing recommendations to the Board regarding the LoC Reference Program.

VIRTUAL ETHNIC RESOURCE CENTER (VERC)

As described to the Board in detail earlier, the VERC has been mounted on a web site at www.verc.org. LSTA funds are currently used for this demonstration project

through September 30, 2001, so that it can continue to develop while Board and staff formally consider the basic components and timing for the LoC Reference Program.

Brochures describing this program were mailed to all California public libraries, the primary audiences for the service, and initial comments were positive. An evaluation form has been mounted on the VERC website to obtain formal assessment of the product by users. The Network Resources Consultant and Assistant Bureau Chief will meet with Triadigm to review the degree of success of the site as indicated by on-line evaluation forms submitted by visitors to the site and by usage statistics. The site will be evaluated relative to other web sites that provide information for similar users, e.g., limited-English persons and those looking for information on African-American history and culture. Pending completion of the review of the VERC, staff plans to make a report and recommendation to the Board in November.

REVIEW OF LOC REFERENCE PROGRAM

It was proposed at the August 2000 Board meeting that a formal review of the statewide reference components of these programs be undertaken to provide the Board with recommendations for the future, overall design of them. This review has begun with the hiring of the Network Resources Consultant. Beginning in July 2001, the Network Resources Consultant is meeting with CLSA System Reference Center Coordinators and other reference-interested librarians, visiting the Reference Centers and other libraries to lend a sense of reality to the discussions. A meeting of the reference coordinators, now charged with providing reference services to the regional library networks and/or to the library systems, is planned for the end of September. Agenda items will include discussion of the changing nature of reference activities, and development of a definition of reference in the current environment, and setting a timeline for discussion and consideration of elements of a statewide reference program.

RELATED ISSUES TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD IN THE FUTURE:

1. Consider report of recommendations on alternative implementations of state reference services under the Library of California Act.
2. Review results of studies and projects now underway, First Source services and the Virtual Ethnic Resource Center.
3. Discuss and consider a definition of reference to provide direction for drafting a plan of statewide reference support.

Relevant Committee: Access Services
Staff Liaison: Cathie Helmick/Diana Paque